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Sara Ahmed

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Collective Feelings

Or, The Impressions Left by Others

Sara Ahmed

The depths of Love are rooted and very deep in a real White Nationalist's soul and spirit, no form of 'hate' could even begin to compare. At least not a hate motivated by ungrounded reasoning. It is not hate that makes the average White man look upon a mixed race couple with a scowl on his face and loathing in his heart. It is not hate that makes the White housewife throw down the daily newspaper in repulsion and anger after reading of yet another child-molester or rapist sentenced by corrupt courts to a couple of short years in prison or parole. It is not hate that makes the White workingman curse about the latest boatload of aliens dumped on our shores to be given job preferences over the White citizen who built this land. It is not hate that brings rage into the heart of a White Christian farmer when he reads of billions loaned or given away as 'aid' to foreigners when he can't get the smallest break from an unmerciful government to save his failing farm. No, it's not hate, It is Love. (Aryan Nations Website)¹

HOW DO emotions work to secure collectives through the way in which they read the bodies of others? How do emotions work to align some subjects with some others and against other others? In this article, I argue that emotions play a crucial role in the 'surfacing' of individual and collective bodies. Such an argument challenges any assumption that emotions are a private matter, that they simply belong to individuals and that they come from within and *then* move outwards towards others. It suggests that emotions are not simply 'within' or 'without', but that they define the contours of the multiple worlds that are inhabited by different subjects.

For instance, in the above narrative on the Aryan Nations website, the role of emotions, in particular of hate and love, is crucial to the delineation of the bodies of individual subjects and the body of the nation. This forming of subject and nation takes place partly by reading 'others' as the *cause* of

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the emotional response. Such narratives imagine a subject (the 'White Nationalist', the 'average White man', the 'White housewife', the 'White workingman', the 'White citizen' and the 'White Christian farmer') that is under threat by imagined others whose proximity threatens not only to take something away from the subject (jobs, security, wealth and so on), but to take the place of the subject. In other words, the presence of these others is imagined as a threat to the object of love. We might note as well that this emotional reading of others as hateful works to align the imagined subject with rights and the imagined nation with ground. This alignment is affected by the representation of both the rights of the subject and the grounds of the nation as already under threat, as 'failing'. *It is the emotional reading of hate that works to stick or to bind the imagined white subject and nation together.* The 'average White man' feels 'fear and loathing'; the 'White housewife', 'repulsion and anger'; the 'White workingman' 'curses'; the 'White Christian farmer' feels 'rage'. The passion of these negative attachments to others is redefined simultaneously as a positive attachment to the imagined subjects brought together through the capitalization of the signifier, 'White'. It is the love of 'White', or those that are recognizable as 'White', which supposedly explains this shared 'communal' visceral response of hate. *Together we hate and this hate is what makes us together.*

This narrative, I would suggest, is far from extraordinary. Indeed, what it shows us is the production of the ordinary. The ordinary is here fantastic. The ordinary white subject is a fantasy that comes into being through the mobilization of hate, as a passionate attachment tied closely to love. The emotion of hate works to animate the ordinary subject, to bring that fantasy to life, by constituting the ordinary as in crisis, and the ordinary person as the *real victim*. The ordinary becomes that which is *already* under threat by the imagined others whose proximity becomes a crime against person as well as place. Hate is *distributed* in such narratives across various figures (in this case, the mixed racial couple, the child-molester or rapist, aliens and foreigners) all of whom come to embody the danger of impurity, or the mixing or taking of blood. They threaten to violate the pure bodies; indeed, such bodies can only be imagined as pure by the perpetual re-staging of this fantasy of violation. The metonymic slide between these figures is dependent on associations that are already in place: so, for example, mixed-race couplings and immigration become readable as (like) forms of rape or molestation: an invasion of the body of the nation, evoked here as the vulnerable and damaged body of the white woman and child. At the same time, the repetition of past associations generates objects, which appear as figures 'with a life of their own' by being cut off from such histories.² It is not that the emotion of hate can be found in a figure. Rather, hate works to create the very outline of different figures, which aligns those figures together, and constitutes them as a 'common' threat.

In this article, I will argue that emotions *do things*, and work to align individuals with collectives – or bodily space with social space – through the very intensity of their attachments. Rather than seeing emotions as

psychological dispositions, we need to consider how they work, in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and collective.³ In focusing on ‘collective feelings’, I will not be discussing the way in which feelings can be ‘feeling for’ or ‘feeling with’ others as with, for example, feelings of sympathy or compassion (Solomon, 1995), which classically have been described as ‘moral sentiments’ (Smith, 1966). Rather, I want to focus on how feelings make ‘the collective’ appear *as if* it were a body in the first place. Of course, many have commented on how emotions are crucial to establishing the social bond, in mass psychology and psychoanalysis (Blackman and Walkerdine, 2002; Freud, 1922), the sociology of emotions (Bendelow and Williams, 1998; Kemper, 1990; Williams, 2001), or in theories of the nation and diaspora as imagined and sentimental communities (Anderson, 1991; Moorti, 2003). I want to build upon such approaches by attending to how the collective takes shape through the impressions made by bodily others. It is not just that we feel for the collective (such as in discourses of fraternity or patriotism), but how we feel about others is what aligns us with a collective, which paradoxically ‘takes shape’ only as an effect of such alignments. It is through an analysis of the impressions left by bodily others that we can track the emergence of ‘feelings-in-common’. My analysis of emotions involves a reading of texts: I am committed to showing not just the textuality of emotions, but also the emotionality of texts. This methodology is not accidental: as I will show, even the most apparently direct sensations or impressions are mediated, involve traces of past impressions on skin surfaces.

Materialization and Intensification

In the first instance, I think we can consider the relationship between movement and attachment implicit in emotion. The word ‘emotion’ comes from Latin, *emovere*, referring to ‘to move, to move out’. So emotions are what move us. But emotions are also *about* attachments, about what connects us to this or that. The relationship between movement and attachment is instructive. What moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place. Emotion may function as a ‘contingent attachment’ to the world (see Sartre, 1996: 333, emphasis mine). The word ‘contingency’ has the same root in Latin as the word ‘contact’ (Latin: *contingere*: *com-*, with; *tangere*, to touch). Contingency is linked then to proximity, to getting close enough to touch another and to be moved by another. So what attaches us, what connects us to this or that place, or to this or that other, *such that we cannot stay removed from this other*, is also what moves us, or what affects us such that we are no longer in the same place. Hence movement does not cut the body off from the ‘where’ of its inhabitation, but connects bodies to other bodies – indeed, attachment takes place through movement, through being moved by the proximity of others. The relationship between movement and attachment is contingent, and this suggests that movement may affect different others differently: indeed, as I

will argue later, emotions may involve 'being moved' for some precisely by 'fixing' others as 'having' certain characteristics.

Emotions, then, are bound up with how we inhabit the world 'with' others. Since emotions are in the phenomenological sense always intentional, and are 'directed' towards an object or other (however imaginary), then emotions are precisely about the intimacy of the 'with'; they are about the intimate relationship between selves, objects and others. Emotions do not involve either the 'inside' getting out or the 'outside' getting in. While the former notion of emotions as 'the inside getting out' might be familiar, given the psychologization of emotions (see White, 1993: 29), the notion of emotions as 'the outside getting in' might seem rather surprising. But this model is clear in some of the early sociological work on emotions. For example, Durkheim considers the rise of emotion in crowds, suggesting that the 'great movements' of feeling, 'do not originate in any of the particular individual consciousnesses', but come from 'without' (1966: 4). Here the individual is no longer the origin of feeling; feeling itself comes from without, from the thickness of sociality itself. As Durkheim's later work on religion suggests, such feelings do not remain 'without'; 'this force must also penetrate us and organize itself within us; it becomes an integral part of our being and by that very fact this is elevated and magnified' (1976: 209). For Durkheim, emotion is not what comes from the individual body, but it is what holds or binds the social body together (see Collins, 1990: 27). This model assumes the objectivity of the very distinction between inside and outside, and between the individual and the social. Rather than emotions being understood as coming from within and moving outwards, emotions are instead assumed to *come from without and move inward*.

In contrast, I want to argue that emotions work to create the very distinction between the inside and the outside, and that this separation takes place through the very movement engendered by responding to others and objects. Rather than locating emotion in the individual or the social, we can see that emotionality – as a responsiveness to and openness towards the worlds of others – involves an interweaving of the personal with the social, and the affective with the mediated. Of course, in more recent social and psychological theory, informed by phenomenology and post-structuralism, emotions have been theorized as interweaving personal, cultural and social dimensions in complex and over-determined ways (see Denzin, 1984; Kemper, 1990; Lupton, 1998; Lutz, 1988; Merleau-Ponty, 1998; Parkinson, 1995). While my argument is indebted to such rich and diverse literatures, I am also making a more specific claim: that it is through the movement of emotions that the very distinction between inside and outside, or the individual and social, is effected in the first place.

Take for instance the sensation of pain. The affectivity of pain is crucial to the forming of the body as both a material and lived entity. In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud (1964: 26) suggests that the ego is 'first and foremost a bodily ego'. Crucially, the formation of the bodily ego is bound up with the surface: 'it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of

a surface' (1964: 26). Freud suggests that the process of establishing the surface depends on the experience of bodily sensations such as pain. Pain is described as a 'thing intermediate between external and internal perceptions, which behaves like an internal perception even when its source is in the external world' (Freud, 1964: 23). It is through experiences such as pain that we come to have a sense of our skin as bodily surface, as something that keeps us apart from others, but as something that also 'mediates' the relationship between internal and external, or inside and outside.

However, it is not that pain *causes* the forming of the surface. Such a reading would ontologize pain (and indeed sensation more broadly) as that which 'drives' being itself. Rather, it is through the flow of sensations and feelings that *become* conscious as pain and pleasure that different surfaces are established. For example, say I stub my toe on the table-leg. The impression of the table is one of negation; it leaves its trace on the surface of my skin and I respond with the appropriate 'ouch' and move away, swearing. It is through such painful encounters between this body and other objects, including other bodies, *that 'surfaces' are felt as 'being there' in the first place.* To be more precise *the impression of a surface is an effect of such intensifications of feeling.* I become aware of my body as having a surface only in the event of feeling discomfort (prickly sensations, cramps), that become transformed into pain through an act of reading and recognition ('It hurts!'), which is also a judgement ('It is bad!'). This transformation of sensations into an emotion might also lead to moving my body away from what I feel has caused the pain. That is, the transformation effected by recognizing a sensation as painful (from 'It hurts' to 'It is bad' to 'Move away') involves the reconstitution of bodily space.

Such an argument suggests an intimate relationship between what Judith Butler (1993: 9) has called materialization, 'the effect of boundary, fixity and surface', and intensification. It is through the intensification of feeling that bodies and worlds materialize and take shape, or that the effect of boundary, fixity and surface is produced. Feelings are not about the inside getting out or the outside getting in, but that they 'affect' the very distinction of inside and outside in the first place. Clearly, to say that feelings are crucial to the forming of surfaces and borders is to suggest that what 'makes' those borders also unmakes them. In other words, what separates us from others also connects us to others. This paradox is clear if we think of the skin surface not only as that which appears to contain us, but as where others *impress* upon us. This contradictory function of skin begins to make sense if we unlearn the assumption that the skin is simply already there, but begin to think of the skin as a surface that is felt only in the event of being 'impressed upon' in the encounters we have with others.

To consider the way emotions are implicated in the surfacing of bodies and worlds we can reflect on the word 'impression'. An impression can simply be an effect on the subject's feelings ('She made an impression'). It can be a belief ('to be under an impression'); it can be an imitation ('to create an impression'), it can be a mark on the surface ('to leave an

impression'). We need to remember the 'press' in an impression. It allows us to associate the experience of having an emotion with the very 'mark' left by the press of one surface upon another. So not only do I have an impression of others, but they also leave me with an impression; they impress me and impress upon me. Indeed, we can think about impressions as the marks left by others, in which the others might leave their mark insofar as they have already left. The impressions of others surface as marks on the body, in which the marks become a sign of absence, or a sign of a presence that 'is no longer'. The impression is a sign of the persistence of others even in the face of their absence. The skin may in this way record past impressions, past encounters with others, who are others insofar as they have already made an impression. Hence the very impression of the skin surface is itself an effect of impressions.

This surfacing of bodies involves the over-determination of sense perception, emotion and judgement. It is through the recognition or interpretation of sensations, which are responses to the impressions of objects and others, and the transformation of such sensations into emotions and judgements, that bodily surfaces take shape. I am not saying here that emotions are the same thing as sensations, but that the very intensity of perception often means a slide from one to another, that does not involve a sequence in time. Hence while sensation and emotion are irreducible, they cannot simply be separated at the level of lived experience.⁴ Sensations are mediated, however immediately they seem to impress upon us. Not only how we read such feelings, but also how the feelings feel in the first place may be tied to a past history of readings, in the sense that the process of recognition (of this feeling or that feeling) is bound up with what we already know. Furthermore, to be touched a certain way, or to be moved a certain way by an encounter with an other, may involve a reading, not only of the encounter, but of the other that is encountered as having certain characteristics. If we feel another hurts us, then we may attribute that feeling to the other, such that the other is read as the impression of the negative. In other words, the 'It hurts' becomes, 'You hurt me', which might become, 'You are hurtful', or even 'I hate you'. These affective responses are readings that not only create the borders between selves and others, but also 'give' others meaning and value in the very moment of apparent separation, a giving which temporarily fixes an other, through the movement engendered by the emotional response itself.⁵ Such emotional responses are clearly mediated: materialization takes place through the 'mediation' of affect, which may function in this way as readings of the bodies of others.

The Skin of the Collective

My analysis suggests that sense perception and emotion take place in what I would call *the contact zone of impressions*; they involve how bodies are 'impressed upon' by objects and others. Such a reading draws on a long and diverse philosophical history, including the work of Descartes, Spinoza and

Deleuze (1992).⁶ We can turn to Descartes' *The Passions of the Soul*. While this little book may be full of problematic distinctions between mind and body, its observations on emotions are very suggestive. Descartes suggests that objects do not excite diverse passions because they are diverse, but because of the diverse ways in which they may harm or help us (1985: 349). This is an intriguing formulation. It suggests that we don't have feelings for objects because of the nature of objects. Feelings instead take the 'shape' of the contact we have with objects. As he puts it later, we do not love and hate because objects are good or bad, but rather because they seem 'agreeable' or 'hurtful' (Descartes, 1985: 350). Whether I perceive something as beneficial or harmful or helpful clearly depends upon how the object affects me. This dependence opens up a gap in the determination of feeling: whether something is agreeable or hurtful involves thought and evaluation, at the same time that it is 'felt' by the body. It is not that one necessarily has to 'take time' to 'think'. One's reaction can be immediate. But the process of attributing an object as being or not being 'agreeable' involves reading the contact we have with objects in a certain way. Contact clearly involves the subject, as well as histories that come before the subject. If emotions are shaped by contact with objects, rather than being caused by objects, then emotions are not simply 'in' the subject or the object. This does not mean that emotions are not read as being 'in' subjects or objects: for example, objects might be read as the cause of emotions in the very process of taking an orientation towards them.

In this section, I want to focus on how the perception of others as 'causing' an emotional response is not simply my perception, but involves a form of 'contact' between myself and others, which is shaped by longer histories of contact. Here, we could draw on the work of Merleau-Ponty (1998), who relates perception precisely to the intercorporeality of being with others. Perception is about how we touch and are touched by others (Weiss, 1999). The intercorporeality of perception depends on histories of reading that come, as it were, 'before' an encounter between subject and another takes place. We can consider racism as a particular form of intercorporeal encounter: a white racist subject who encounters a racial other may experience an intensity of emotions (fear, hate, disgust, pain). That intensification involves moving away from the body of the other, or moving towards that body in an act of violence, and then moving away. The 'moment of contact' is shaped by past histories of contact, which allows the proximity of a racial other to be perceived as threatening, at the same time as it reshapes the bodies in the contact zone of the encounter. These histories have already impressed upon the surface of the bodies at the same time as they create new impressions.

We can see the way in which contact between others involves repeating associations that are already in place in the opening quote from the Aryan Nations web site. The perception of others as the origin of danger is shaped by histories of racism (in which the presence of others is already read as an invasion of bodily territory as well as the territory of the nation).

The repetition of signs is what allows others to be attributed with emotional value: as being hateful in the first place (see Fanon, 1986). Hence the contact both depends on histories of association, at the same time as it generates its object: the mixed-race couple, the immigrant, etc. In this way, emotions can be theorized as performative: they both repeat past associations as well as generating their object (Butler, 1993).⁷ We could consider the performative as the emotive (see Reddy, 2001). Hate may generate the other as the object of hate insofar as it repeats associations that already read the bodies of others as being hateful. Indeed, the loop of the performative works powerfully: in reading the other as being hateful, the subject is filled up with hate, as a sign of the truth of the reading.

Emotional responses to others involve the alignment of subjects with and against other others. Take the following quote from Audre Lorde's (1984: 147–8) *Sister Outsider*:

The AA subway train to Harlem. I clutch my mother's sleeve, her arms full of shopping bags, christmas-heavy. The wet smell of winter clothes, the train's lurching. My mother spots an almost seat, pushes my little snowsuited body down. On one side of me a man reading a paper. On the other, a woman in a fur hat staring at me. Her mouth twitches as she stares and then her gaze drops down, pulling mine with it. Her leather-gloved hand plucks at the line where my new blue snowpants and her sleek fur coat meet. She jerks her coat closer to her. I look. I do not see whatever terrible thing she is seeing on the seat between us – probably a roach. But she has communicated her horror to me. It must be something very bad from the way she's looking, so I pull my snowsuit closer to me away from it, too. When I look up the woman is still staring at me, her nose holes and eyes huge. And suddenly I realise there is nothing crawling up the seat between us; it is me she doesn't want her coat to touch. The fur brushes my face as she stands with a shudder and holds on to a strap in the speeding train. Born and bred a New York City child, I quickly slide over to make room for my mother to sit down. No word has been spoken. I'm afraid to say anything to my mother because I don't know what I have done. I look at the side of my snow pants secretly. Is there something on them? Something's going on here I do not understand, but I will never forget it. Her eyes. The flared nostrils. The hate.

In this encounter Audre Lorde ends with emotion; she ends with 'the hate'. It is an encounter in which some-thing has passed, but something she fails to understand. What passes is not spoken; it is not a transparent form of communication. The sense that something is wrong is communicated, not through words, or even sounds that are voiced, but through the body of another, 'her nose holes and eyes huge'. The encounter is played out *on* the body, and is played out *with* the emotions. This bodily encounter, while ending with 'the hate', also ends with the reconstitution of bodily space. The bodies that come together, that almost touch and co-mingle, slide away from each other, becoming relived in their apartness. The particular bodies that move apart allow the redefinition of social as well as bodily integrity. The

emotion of hate aligns the particular white body with the bodily form of the community – the emotion functions to substantiate the threat of invasion and contamination in the body of a particular other who comes to stand for, and stand in for, the other as such. In other words, the hate encounter aligns not only the ‘I’ with the ‘we’ (the white body, the white nation), but the ‘you’ with the ‘them’ (the black body, Black people).

In Audre Lorde’s narrative, her perception of the cause of the woman’s bodily gestures is a *misperception* that creates an object. The object – the roach – comes to stand for, or stand in for, the cause of ‘the hate’. The roach crawls up between them; the roach, as the carrier of dirt, divides the two bodies, forcing them to move apart. Audre pulls her snowsuit, ‘away from it too’. But the ‘it’ that divides them is not the roach. Audre comes to realize that, ‘it is me she doesn’t want her coat to touch’. What the woman’s clothes must not touch, is not a roach that crawls between them, but Audre herself. Audre becomes the ‘it’ that stands between the possibility of their clothes touching. She becomes the roach – the impossible and phobic object – that threatens to crawl from one to the other: ‘I don’t know what I have done. I look at the side of my snow pants secretly. Is there something on them?’ Here, the circulation of hate brings others and objects into existence; hate slides between different signs and objects whose existence is bound up with the negation of its travel. So Audre becomes the roach that is imagined as the cause of the hate. The transformation of *this* or *that* other into an object of hate is over-determined. It is not simply that any body is hated: particular histories are re-opened in each encounter, such that some bodies are already read as more hateful than other bodies. Histories are bound up with attachments precisely insofar as it is a question of *what sticks*, of what connections are lived as the most intense or intimate, as being closer to the skin. The encounter moves us sideways (the sticky associations between dirt, the roach, the Black body) and forwards and backwards (the histories that are already in place that to these associations and not others make stick, and that allow them to surface in memory and writing).

Importantly the alignment of some bodies with some others and against others takes place through the affecting of movement; bodies are disorganized and reorganized as they face others who are already recognized as hated or loved, as giving pain or pleasure. The organization of social and bodily space creates a border that is transformed into an object, as an effect of this intensification of feeling. So the white woman’s refusal to touch the Black child does not simply stand for the expulsion of Blackness from white social space, but actually re-forms social space through re-forming the apartness of the white body. The re-forming of bodily and social space involves a process of making the skin crawl; the threat posed by the bodies of others is registered on the skin. Or, to be more precise, the skin comes to be felt as a border through reading the impression of one surface upon another as a form of negation. Such impressions are traces on the skin surface of the presence of others, and they depend on the repetition of past associations, through which the other is attributed as the cause of bad feeling. It is

through how others impress upon us that the skin of the collective begins to take shape.

Global Feelings

We can relate this discussion of emotions as involving the surfacing of bodies to a reflection on how the global body comes to be imagined or felt. To think of ‘the globe’ as ‘having a skin’ is to suggest that emotions are not simply directed to nearby others: a feeling for and with others can also occur when others are remote or distant. Such distance is transformed into proximity through the very ‘impressions’ we make of others, which transforms others into objects of feeling. Others do not have to be nearby to make or leave an impression. In this section, I consider how more traditional forms of collective identity, premised on discourses of feeling-in-common, work by transforming others into objects of our feeling, or by appropriating the feelings of others.

How does the other circulate as an object of feeling in global politics? Let’s consider the following quote from a Christian Aid letter:

Landmines. What does this word mean to you? Darkened by the horrific injuries and countless fatalities, it probably makes you feel angry or saddened. *I’m sure you’ll be interested in the success stories that your regular support has helped to bring about: Landmines.* Landmines are causing pain and suffering all over the world, and that is why Christian Aid is working with partners across the globe to remove them. . . . *Landmines.* What does this word mean to you now? I hope you feel a sense of empowerment. (Christian Aid letter, 9 June 2003)⁸

Here, the pain of others is first evoked through the use of the word ‘landmines’. The word is not accompanied by a description or history; it is assumed that the word is enough to evoke images of pain and suffering for the reader. Indeed, the word is repeated in the letter, and is transformed from ‘sign’ to the ‘agent’ behind the injuries: ‘landmines are causing pain and suffering all around the world’. Of course, this utterance speaks a certain truth. And yet, to make landmines the ‘cause’ of pain and suffering is to stop too soon in a chain of events: landmines are themselves effects of histories of war; they were placed by humans to injure and maim other humans. The word evokes that history, but it also stands in for it, as a history of war, suffering and injustice. Such a letter shows us how the language of pain operates through signs, which convey histories that involve injuries to bodies, at the same time as they conceal the presence or ‘work’ of other bodies.

The letter is addressed to ‘friends’ of Christian Aid, those who have already made donations to the charity. It focuses on the emotions of the reader who is interpellated as ‘you’, as the one who ‘probably’ has certain feelings about the suffering and pain of others. So ‘you’ probably feel ‘angry’ or ‘saddened’. The readers are moved by the injuries of others, and it is this

movement that allows them to give. To this extent, the letter is not about the other, but about the reader: the reader's feelings are the ones that are addressed, and which are the 'subject' of the letter. The negative emotions of anger and sadness are evoked as the reader's: the pain of others becomes 'ours', an appropriation that transforms and neutralizes their pain into our sadness. It is not so much that we are 'with them' by feeling sad; the apparently shared negative feeling state does not position the reader and victim in a relation of equivalence. Rather, we feel sad *about* their suffering, an 'aboutness' that ensures that they remain the object of 'our feeling'. So, at one level, the reader in accepting the imperative to feel sad about the other's pain is aligned with the other. But that alignment works by differentiating between the reader and the others: their feelings remain the object of 'my feelings', while my feelings only approximate the form of theirs. Indeed, the appropriation of the other's feelings produces a different alignment: the reader is aligned with the charity, and other 'partners across the globe', as the ones who are alleviating the suffering of others.

It is instructive that the narrative of the letter is hopeful. The letter promises a lot for sure. What is promised is not so much the overcoming of the pain of others (although this overcoming is part of the story), but the empowerment of the reader: 'I hope you feel a sense of empowerment.' In other words, the overcoming of the pain of others is what gives the reader hope; it is how the reader becomes empowered. So the reader, whom we can name inadequately as the Western subject, feels better after hearing stories about individual success, which are also narrated as the healing of community. These stories are about the lives of individuals that have been saved: 'Chamreun is a survivor of a landmine explosion and, having lost his leg, is all the more determined to make his community a safer place in which to live.' These stories of bravery, of the overcoming of pain, are indeed moving. But interestingly the agent in the stories is not the other, but the charity, aligned here with the reader: through 'your regular support', you have 'helped bring about' these success stories. Hence the narrative of the letter ends with the reader's 'empowerment': the word 'landmines', it is suggested, now makes 'you' feel a sense of empowerment, rather than anger or sadness.

In the letter, the reader is constructed as the one who is moved by that pain into a position of empowerment via a detour into the emotions of anger and sadness. Being moved by the other's pain elevates the Western subject into a position of power over others: the subject who gives to the other is the one who is 'behind' the possibility of overcoming pain. As Elizabeth Spelman notes in *Fruits of Sorrow*, 'compassion, like other forms of caring, may also reinforce the very pattern of economic and political subordination responsible for such suffering' (1998: 7). The over-representation of the pain of others is significant in that it fixes the other as the one who 'has' pain, and who can overcome that pain only when the Western subject feels moved enough to give. The transformation of generosity into an individual and national character involves a form of 'feeling fetishism': feelings of

compassion are fetishized by being cut off from histories of production. In the Christian Aid letter, feelings of pain and suffering, which are in part effects of socio-economic relations of violence and poverty, are assumed to be alleviated by the very generosity that is enabled by such socio-economic relations. In this case, the West is the one that gives to others only insofar as it is forgotten what the West has already taken in its very *capacity* to give in the first place. The subject, in being moved by the other's pain, even claims the other's feeling as its own, a claim which is temporary, and which is passed over in the very announcement of the alleviation of the other's suffering. Such an economy of movement for some through the fixation of others is concealed by discourses of fellow feeling or feeling-in-common.

The concealment of such economies in discourses of fellow feeling is evident in some recent celebrations of cosmopolitanism, for example in the work of Martha Nussbaum (1996). Nussbaum calls for a notion of 'world citizen', based on a universal notion of the rights of others as members of the human race. As Nussbaum (1996: 17) suggests, 'the life of the cosmopolitan' begins by putting 'rights before country and universal reason before the symbols of national belonging'. It should not take us long to note here how this defence of cosmopolitanism against nationalism involves a substantial rather than simply formalist version of universalism. For in order to define the foundation of the community of world citizens, Nussbaum appeals to universal reason. The presumption of the neutrality of reason as the foundation of the global community works to conceal how reason is already defined as the property of some bodies and not others. Or, it conceals how reason works precisely to universalize from a particular body, with its own histories of production, exchange and consumption. In other words, the apparent disembodiment or detachment of world citizenship conceals how it is shaped by and means entering into a body (both individual and collective) that has already taken a particular rather than universal form.

At the same time, Nussbaum calls into question this world citizenship as the detachment of a reasonable subject from her or his locality. So she states that the life of the cosmopolitan is still full of allegiance, and therefore, that it does not have to be 'boring, flat or lacking in love' (Nussbaum, 1996: 17). She suggests here that we can feel close to others who are distant, by identifying ourselves as world or global citizens. Now this is important for the purposes of my argument. For it shows us that globality works as a form of attachment, as a love for those others who are 'with me' and 'like me' insofar as they can be recognized as worldly humans. It hence suggests that love can be the foundation of a global community, a community of others that I love. Such a cosmopolitan identity hence allows others to become members of the community only insofar as they take form in a way that I recognize as 'like me'. I would suggest this merely shifts ethnocentrism from a local or national to a global level: others become loved as global citizens insofar as they, like me, can give up their local attachments and become part of the new community. In other words, by talking of the global citizen's love as well as its reason, Nussbaum also defines the conditions or limits of

global hospitality: those bodies/subjects that are not reasonable and worldly cannot be admitted into such a community. Importantly, Nussbaum's argument makes clear that giving up local attachments does not mean a suspension of attachment, as such. Rather, one becomes attached to the form of globality itself; *globality is now what would move one to tears*. Here one can see how 'being moved' is not a suspension of attachment: one can become attached to movement itself as a new form of social bonding. Such an attachment to movement suggests that the ones who cannot be admitted into the global body are the ones who remain too attached to the particular, the ones who do not (or perhaps even cannot) move away from home.

In order to dramatize how movement itself becomes the basis for a differentiation between 'inside' and 'outside', which materializes as the global body, I want to examine the web site of the Global Nomads International called the *Global Nomads Virtual Village* (www.gnvv.org). I have already reflected on the Global Nomads International in *Strange Encounters*, basing my reflections on their publication, *Strangers at Home* (Smith, 1996). We can examine more closely how they have used the Internet to create the global nomad community described in this publication. The Global Nomads are a non-profit organization designed to foster a sense of community for those who were brought up 'overseas', especially as children of diplomats or members of the military. This organization is partly about producing highly mobile, skilled and flexible bodies, whose value in an international economy is based on their ability to see 'beyond the local' and to translate across differences. As Norma McCaig, the founding member of the organization, puts it, 'In an era when global vision is an imperative, when skills in intercultural communication, linguistic ability, mediation, diplomacy, and the management of diversity are critical, global nomads are better equipped' (1996: 100). The organization provides us with a clear example about how the mobility of bodies is required by the forces of global capital; how, that is, mobility works to extend the privileges or reach of some bodies into spaces that are already marked out as having global value.

What is equally important is how the organization uses global culture and technologies to create a sense of community. In the web site, Global Nomads Virtual Village (GNVV), it is explained that the purpose of the village is 'To connect to others like us'. Here, the web page allows a form of connection with others whom the user may not know, but is assumed to be like, because of the shared experience of being away from home, or growing up in another country. Community involves here the making of ground, rather than settlement on the ground. To put it differently, the basis of the differentiation of 'like' from 'unlike' becomes 'grounded' in movement itself. The collective of global nomads, in other words, despite its apparent lack of a shared ground, still grounds itself in a version of identity as self-likeness, an identity that is brought into existence through the ontologizing of movement. The 'I' of the global nomad becomes the 'we' of the global nomads through the transformation of mobility into a form of love and likeness. Hence the GNVV site exists to 'span the globe', to 'pass on their

legacy', 'to provide a rallying point' and so on. The assumption is that the community comes together in the virtual plaza, other places are simply where the global nomads pass through providing the pleasure of a difference, which is pleasurable insofar as it is temporary. Other places and possibly other people are points of temporary abode on the global nomad's itinerary. They are hence unlike the global nomad insofar as they are assumed to stay put; indeed, global nomads require 'others' to stay put in order to be differentiated from the locals, and to be 'like each other'. Others remain objects of 'our feeling', as we pass through their locality, always moving, by moving on.

Clearly, 'the nomadic' can become a global identity premised upon 'giving up' home and locality, which remains grounded in traditional notions of sameness and belonging. Rather than belonging here or there, global nomads now belong everywhere, in the imagined space of globality itself. Not only is this identity created through moving across the surfaces of the globe (a movement which creates the effect of surfaces), but it is also created through moving through the web site itself, which describes itself as a virtual village. Global Nomads can send in their own photos of their travels, and can hence participate in the making of the village (<http://www.gnvv.org/Plaza/plaza.html>). The bodies of global nomads hence become aligned with the globe, an alignment that takes place through movement, and which produces the very effect of a global body. The Global Nomads Virtual Village describes itself as a 'virtual hub' of this new community, which 'celebrates the distinctive global nomadic identity'. The transformation of the global into a form of identity, based on love for those who are 'like me', clearly involves a form of fetishism, which cuts bodies off from grounds, and creates virtual grounds to take their place. Not only is global nomadism about the production of a mobile and flexible skilled workforce (or about the bodily capital required by the mobility of global capital), but it also involves forms of *attachment to movement*, such that 'movement' becomes a new ground of membership in a collective, and a new way of differentiating between others.

We can see that the surfaces and boundaries of the global body materialize through processes of intensification in which the bodies of others are both felt and read as 'like me' or 'not like me'. Globality becomes a form of attachment; *one can be moved precisely by the imagined form of globality itself*. This attachment is contingent; it depends on proximity to others with whom global nomads identify and on whom they remain dependent. And we can see that such proximity does not require physical co-presence: the body of the global nomadic community 'surfaces' through giving up local attachments (where the screen becomes a substitute for the skin). Indeed, globality is an effect that depends on the movement and circulation of some bodies, images and objects and not others. Globality in this way 'surfaces' as a felt collective through the movement of some bodies, which is afforded by the fixing of others. Such fixation involves the transformation of others into objects of 'our feeling'.

My argument in this article has been that emotions are crucial to the way in which bodies surface in relation to other bodies, a surfacing that produces the very effect of collectives, which we can describe as ‘felt’ as well as imagined and mediated. Borders materialize as an effect of intensifications of feeling. The skin is, after all, a border that feels. To discuss the collective as ‘having’ a skin is not to posit the collective body as being ‘like’ the individual body. Rather, it is to suggest that individual and collective bodies surface through the very orientations we take to objects and others. But the role of feelings in mediating the relation between individual and collective bodies is complicated. How we feel about another – or a group of others – is not simply a matter of individual impressions, or impressions that are created anew in the present. Rather, feelings rehearse associations that are already in place, in the way in which they ‘read’ the proximity of others, at the same time as they establish the ‘truth’ of the reading. The impressions we have of others, and the impressions left by others are shaped by histories that stick, at the same time as they generate the surfaces and boundaries that allow bodies to appear in the present. The impressions left by others should impress us for sure; it is here, on the skin surface, that histories are made.

Notes

1. The website was accessed on 4 January 2001: <http://www.nidlink.com/~aryanvic/index-E.html>
2. For a discussion of stranger fetishism as a fetishism of figures see the introduction to my book, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-coloniality* (2000), which draws on the Marxian critique of commodity fetishism.
3. This article is drawn from my forthcoming book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, in which I examine pain, fear, hate, shame, disgust and love, and the slide between these emotions in texts and discourses that circulate within public culture. My concern is not with defining a specific logic for each emotion: indeed, I would argue that the naming of an emotion involves a form of catachresis; emotions do not have a referent, but the naming of emotions works to establish boundaries that then come to have a referential function. More specifically, I examine how the naming of emotions involves different orientations towards objects and others.
4. I am hence departing from the recent tendency to separate affect and emotion, which is clear in the work of Massumi (2002). For sure the experience of ‘having’ an emotion may be distinct from sensations and impressions, which may burn the skin before any conscious moment of recognition. But this model creates a distinction between conscious recognition and ‘direct’ feeling, which negates how what is not consciously experienced may still be mediated by past experiences. I am suggesting here that even seeming direct responses actually evoke past histories, and that this process bypasses consciousness, through bodily memories. So sensations may not be about conscious recognition, but this does not mean they are ‘direct’ in the sense of immediate. Further, emotions clearly involve sensations: this analytic distinction between affect and emotion risks cutting emotions off from the lived experiences of being and having a body.
5. Given the emphasis here on the subject’s perceptions and readings in the making

of objects and others, is this a radical form of subjectivism? It is important for me to indicate here how this argument is not subjectivist, but one that undermines the subjective/objective distinction. I am certainly suggesting that ‘nothing’ or ‘no body’ has positive characteristics: affect, meaning, value, as well as matter, ‘surface’ in relations of difference. So it is not that a subject ‘gives’ meaning and value to others. Rather, subjects as well as objects are effects of encounters. Affective encounters, insofar as they open up histories of past encounters, do not make something out of nothing: subjects as well as objects ‘accrue’ characteristics over time (a process which shows precisely how these characteristics are not a positive form of residence) that makes it possible to speak of them as prior to a specific encounter. So my argument that the subject’s perception and reading of objects and others are crucial does not necessarily exercise a radical form of subjectivism; it does not posit the subject’s consciousness as that which makes the world. The subject both materializes as an effect of encounters and has, in some sense, *already materialized* given such histories.

6. See the introduction of *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Ahmed, forthcoming) for an extension of this argument. I explore the links between the different accounts of the role of the object in emotion, showing how the model of emotions as shaped by the contact with objects relates to the model of emotional intentionality (objects as ‘aboutness’) and theories of the unconscious (where the object circulates through displacement and condensation).

7. I do not have time here to explore the performativity of emotions. See the chapter on disgust in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Ahmed, forthcoming) as well as Reddy’s (2001) book, which introduces the concept of ‘the emotive’.

8. Thanks to Sarah Franklin who brought this letter to my attention.

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Sara Ahmed is Reader in Women's Studies at Lancaster University. Her publications include *Differences that Matter: Feminist Theory and Postmodernism* (1998); *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-coloniality* (2000); (co-edited) *Transformations: Thinking Through Feminism* (2000); (co-edited) *Thinking Through the Skin* (2001) and (co-edited) *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration* (2003). Her next book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, will be published by Edinburgh University Press in 2004.